



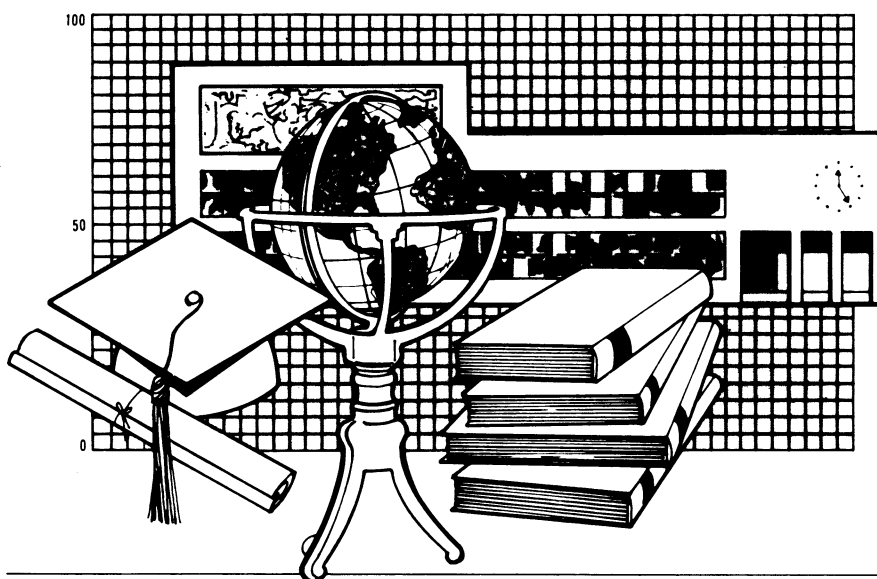
CURRENT POPULATION REPORTS

Population Characteristics

Series P-20, No. 451

by
Robert Kominski

Educational Attainment in the United States: March 1989 and 1988



U.S. Department of Commerce
Economics and Statistics Administration
BUREAU OF THE CENSUS

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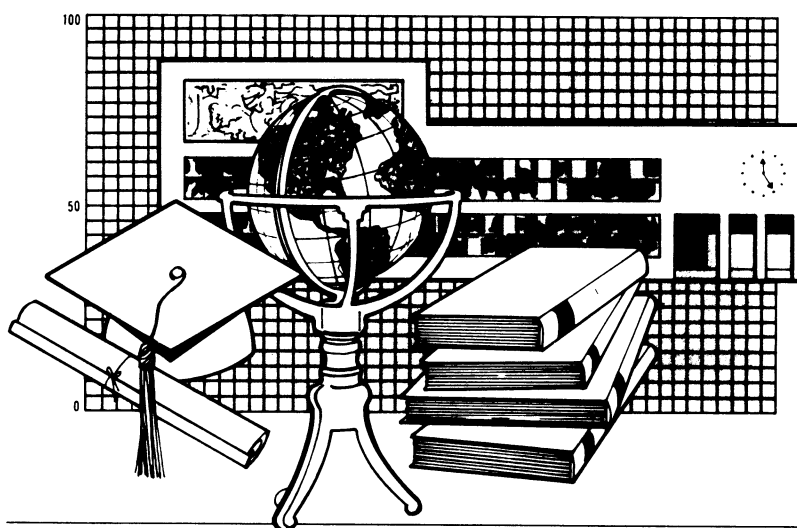
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Issued August 1991

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U.S. Department of Commerce

Robert A. Mosbacher, Secretary

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Educational Attainment in the United States: March 1989 and 1988

(The estimates in this report do not reflect the results of the 1990 Census. The Current Population Survey (CPS) estimates are based on population controls from the 1980 census which have been updated for changes in the population since that time. In addition, the CPS and the 1990 census used different procedures for collecting and processing the data.)

INTRODUCTION

This report contains data on the educational attainment of persons in the United States from the Current Population Surveys (CPS) conducted by the Bureau of the Census in March 1988 and 1989. Summary data on years of school completed by age, sex, race and Hispanic origin are shown for 1988 and 1989 in table 1. Other detailed data are shown for 1989 in tables 2 through 16. These data allow for the continuation of the biennial series of detailed tables as presented in previous reports. Tables 17 and 18 contain time series of data collected from 1940 to 1989 in the decennial censuses and CPS (1947-1989). This report is designed to provide published detailed tabulations of the data along with a short discussion of basic trends and attainment levels across many segments of the population.

The detailed tables present data on years of school completed by persons 15 years old and over, by age, sex, race, Hispanic origin, marital status, household relationship, education of spouse, labor force status, occupation, income, earnings, and region of residence. Summary data are also presented for all states and large metropolitan areas, as well as detailed data for the 25 largest states and 15 largest metropolitan areas.

HIGHLIGHTS

(Figures shown in parentheses define 90 percent confidence intervals. For details of calculation, see "Appendix B, Source and Accuracy of the Estimates.")

- Over three-fourths ($76.9 \pm .3$) of all adults age 25 and over have completed high school; over one-fifth ($21.1 \pm .3$) have completed four or more years of college. Both levels represent all-time national highs.
- Educational attainment levels for young adults (ages 25 to 29) are not different from those recorded in the mid-1970's. High school: $85.5 (\pm .6)$ vs. $85.4 (\pm .6)$ in 1977. College: $23.4 (\pm .8)$ vs. $23.7 (\pm .7)$ in 1976.
- Among persons 25 and over, slightly larger proportions of men ($77.2 \pm .4$) than women ($76.6 \pm .4$) have completed high school. Similarly, larger proportions of men ($24.5 \pm .4$) than women ($18.1 \pm .4$) have completed 4 or more years of college.

- While Whites 25 and over have the highest level of high school completion, persons of races other than White or Black have the highest college completion level. High school: White $78.4 (\pm .3)$, Black $64.6 (\pm 1.2)$, other races $76.1 (\pm 1.9)$. College: White $21.8 (\pm .3)$, Black $11.8 (\pm .8)$, other races $34.2 (\pm 2.1)$
- Both high school ($80.8 \pm .7$) and college completion ($24.8 \pm .8$) levels are higher in the West than any other region.

TRENDS IN EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

The educational level of the adult population continued to rise in 1989, following a general trend that has been noted in the Current Population Survey data since first produced in 1947. Over three-quarters (76.9 percent) of all adults age 25 or older reported completing at least 4 years of high school, the highest level measured in the history of the survey. The level of high school completion in 1989 reached a peak not only for the entire population, but also for each sex, and White persons. The proportions for Black and Hispanic persons were not statistically different from the 1988 or 1987 levels but were higher than the proportions in previous years.

Another basic measure of educational attainment is the proportion of persons who have completed four or more years of college. As with high school completion, this figure is also at a record-high level. Over one-in-five adults (21.1 percent) age 25 or above have completed four or more years of college. The proportion of the population having attained this level of education has doubled in the past twenty years.

Figure 1 (based on table 18) shows the proportion of persons having completed high school and four or more years of college for both the age 25 and over population and for persons ages 25 to 29. This latter group is often used to get a better idea of recent attainment levels. In general, the long-term rise in educational attainment for the general adult population is driven principally by the replacement of older less-educated persons by younger persons who have completed substantially more education.

This graph documents the general trend of rising educational attainment levels for the population and indicates that the increase in attainment among younger

persons which has slowed considerably may be levelling off. For example, the proportion of 25 to 29 year olds who had completed high school was no different in 1989 than it was in 1977. While there has been some variation over this period, yearly point estimates have been in the range of 85-86 percent. Similarly, the estimated proportion of young persons completing 4 or more years of college has been in the low 20's since the mid-1970's. Given the very large differences in education between young and old age groups (table A), however, the attainment level of the total adult population will continue to rise for some time, as young age groups replace older age groups, even if attainment levels for young persons remain constant.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT IN 1989

Traditionally, differences in educational attainment have been noted across many different dimensions; in 1989 this continued to be true. Tables A and B show three basic measures of educational attainment: completion of high school or more; completion of 1 or more years of college; and completion of 4 or more years of college. These measures are presented for the population ages 25 and older, cross-classified by a series of sociodemographic factors, in order to illustrate some of these differences. Data shown in these tables summarize the more detailed tabulations in this report.

Gender: Educational attainment levels are higher for men than for women for each of the three measures shown in table A. In terms of high school completion,

Table A. Summary Measures of the Educational Attainment of the Population, Ages 25 and Over: March 1989

(Numbers in thousands)

Age, sex, race, region, residence, and Hispanic origin	Number of persons	Percentage with—		
		4 years of high of high school	1 or more years of college	4 or more years of college
All persons	154,155	76.9	38.4	21.1
Sex:				
Male	73,225	77.2	41.8	24.5
Female	80,930	76.6	35.3	18.1
Race:				
White	132,903	78.4	39.3	21.8
Black	16,395	64.6	28.1	11.8
Other	4,857	76.1	48.6	34.2
Hispanic origin: ¹				
Hispanic	10,438	50.9	23.0	9.9
Non-Hispanic	143,717	78.8	39.5	21.9
Age group:				
25 to 34 years old	43,240	86.6	45.2	24.2
35 to 44 years old	35,873	86.6	49.4	27.9
45 to 54 years old	24,621	78.4	37.9	22.0
55 to 64 years old	21,399	69.1	29.5	16.2
65 to 74 years old	17,747	60.4	23.3	11.7
75 years or older	11,276	46.2	19.2	10.1
Marital status:				
Never married	20,318	81.0	47.4	28.8
Married spouse present	100,622	79.8	39.8	22.2
Married spouse absent	5,279	64.8	27.9	13.6
Single	4,068	66.0	26.1	12.0
Widowed	13,746	51.8	18.6	8.4
Divorced	14,190	79.3	38.6	17.4
Region:				
Northeast	33,064	77.9	37.9	23.1
Midwest	37,217	78.8	35.6	18.9
South	52,559	72.5	35.7	19.3
West	31,315	80.8	46.7	24.8
Metropolitan residence:				
Metropolitan area	119,716	78.8	41.6	23.4
Nonmetropolitan area	34,439	70.2	27.4	13.2
Farm	3,034	72.1	25.1	11.3

¹Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.

the statistically significant difference between men (77.2 percent) and women (76.6 percent) is relatively small. Differences are much more pronounced at the college level, where 24.5 percent of men, but only 18.1 percent of women, have completed four or more years of college. While 35.3 percent of women have completed one or more years of college, the proportion for men is 41.8.

Race: Comparison of educational attainment among Whites, Blacks and persons of other races shows sizable differences. Among Whites, 78.4 percent have completed high school, slightly higher than the 76.1 percent recorded for persons of other races (which includes Asians and Pacific Islanders, and American Indians, Eskimos and Aleuts). The proportion for each of these groups is higher than the Black proportion of 64.6 percent.

Differences are also evident at the college completion level, with the highest levels reported by persons of other races: 34.2 percent have completed four or more years of college, compared to 21.8 percent of Whites, and 11.8 percent of Blacks. A similar ordering exists among these groups in terms of completing one or more years of college:

Hispanic origin: At all three levels of attainment shown, persons of Hispanic origin (who may be of any race) have the lowest proportions of completed education, in comparison to all Whites, Blacks, and persons of other races. About one-half of Hispanic adults have completed high school, 23 percent have completed 1 or more years of college, and about one in ten have completed four or more years of college.

Age: One dimension which shows great variability in measures of educational attainment is age. While fewer than half (46.2 percent) of those age 75 and above have completed high school, 86.6 percent of persons ages 25 to 44 have attained this level. In terms of postsecondary schooling, 10.1 percent of the age 75 and older population, as opposed to 27.9 percent of persons ages 35 to 44, have completed college. In general, for each education measure, attainment levels are lowest for the oldest age group, and rise across successively younger groups. Only the youngest age group shown in table A (ages 25 to 34) deviates from this pattern, primarily because some of these individuals have not completed their schooling, particularly at the postsecondary level.

Marital Status: Differences in educational attainment across marital statuses reflect to a large extent differences in the age composition of marital status groups. For example, the high level of high school completion among never married persons (81 percent) is reflective of the fact that this group is relatively young. Conversely, the low level among widowed persons (51.8 percent) is in part because this group consists primarily of older persons. A similar pattern is seen in college completion.

Region: Among the four Census regions (Northeast, Midwest, South and West) the proportion of persons who completed high school ranges from 72.5 in the South to 80.8 in the West. In terms of college attainment the West is highest in both the completion of 1 or more years (46.7 percent) and four or more years (24.8 percent). The data also show that attainment levels are higher for each of the three measures in metropolitan areas than in nonmetropolitan areas.

Labor force: The first panel of table B presents educational attainment measures for the civilian labor force, ages 25 and older. Among employed persons, educational attainment is quite high, with 86.1 percent of those employed reporting high school completion, and 26.8 percent having completed four or more years of college. For all three summary measures, attainment is higher for the employed than for the unemployed population, who in turn have higher attainment than those persons who are not in the labor force.

Occupation: Table B also shows the educational attainment of employed persons ages 25 to 64, by major occupational groups. There is great variation in educational attainment when examined even across this small set of summary occupational categories. While 99 percent of the workers in professional specialty occupations have completed high school, about 51 percent of private household workers have achieved this level of education.

With respect to higher education, 76.5 percent of persons in professional specialty occupations have completed four or more years of college, the highest level across the major occupation groups. For many occupations, however, fewer than ten percent of the workers have completed college; this includes categories such as precision production workers and machine operators.

Income: Table C shows estimates of mean personal income in 1988 for all persons reporting income for that year, detailed by several general levels of educational attainment, sex, race and Hispanic origin. As can be seen, the relationship of education and income is strongly positive; income levels are higher at each progressively higher level of education. This relationship holds true not only for the total population, but for each of the subgroups examined as well.

Variation in income within each specific education level is also apparent, and may result from a variety of factors, including such things as occupational composition, age structure, labor force experience, and other forces. The relationship between education and income is a well-studied phenomenon; the data shown in table C are intended only to summarize the current level of that relationship, and do not address the more detailed issue of variations in income due to other social and demographic forces.

Table B. Educational Attainment by Labor Force Status and Occupation: March 1989
(Numbers in thousands)

Occupations	Number of persons	Percentage with—		
		4 years of high school or more	1 or more years of college	4 or more years of college
Civilian labor force				
Employed.....	96,426	86.1	46.8	26.8
Not employed.....	4,382	71.8	28.4	13.1
Not in the labor force.....	52,608	60.2	23.5	11.2
Occupation of employed persons 25 to 64				
Executive, admin., and managerial.....	13,380	96.0	69.4	45.8
Professional specialty occupations.....	14,080	99.0	91.1	76.5
Technicians and related support occ.....	3,129	97.5	69.5	34.1
Sales occupations.....	9,934	91.9	52.2	28.8
Administrative support occupations including clerical.....	14,325	95.0	41.4	13.8
Private household occupations.....	590	50.7	13.9	5.0
Other service occupations.....	10,028	75.5	26.2	8.1
Farming, forestry, and fishing.....	2,156	65.4	22.5	9.0
Precision prod., craft, and repair.....	11,526	79.4	26.0	6.5
Machine operators, assemblers, and inspectors.....	6,909	67.6	15.8	3.9
Transportation and material moving.....	3,986	72.2	18.5	4.9
Handlers, equip. cleaners, helpers, and laborers.....	2,974	68.9	17.4	4.4

Table C. Mean 1988 Income by Education Attainment, Sex, Race and Hispanic Origin

Persons ages 18 and above	Total	Less than 4 years high school	High school 4 years	College		
				1 to 3 years	4 years	5 years
Total.....	\$18,596	\$10,326	\$15,886	\$19,107	\$28,406	\$38,604
Male.....	\$24,852	\$13,655	\$21,583	\$24,552	\$37,002	\$47,797
Female.....	\$12,639	\$7,004	\$11,143	\$14,041	\$19,215	\$25,404
White.....	\$19,246	\$10,800	\$16,294	\$19,522	\$28,972	\$39,139
Black.....	\$13,395	\$8,150	\$12,938	\$16,150	\$23,776	\$30,429
Hispanic Origin ¹	\$13,811	\$9,852	\$13,800	\$17,930	\$23,456	\$34,567

¹Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.

State and Metropolitan Area Estimates. Since 1977 this report has included summary educational attainment data for a group of the largest states and metropolitan areas in the country. Starting with this issue, the amount of data shown for states and metropolitan areas is being expanded. The report will now show several summary measures of educational attainment (proportion completing high school; proportion completing 4 or more years of college) for all 50 states and the District of Columbia (table 13), as well as more detailed data for the 25 largest states (table 14). Similarly, there will be summary data for a group of the largest metropolitan areas (table 15), and more detailed data for the 15 largest such areas (table 16).

These data should be useful for a variety of purposes. Users are strongly cautioned that these estimates are based on the CPS sample (as are all data shown in this report). As such, the estimated values (or "point estimates") are subject to sampling variability, which must be taken into account when making comparisons for different states or areas. For this reason,

tables 13 through 16 include the values necessary for constructing 90 percent confidence intervals around each of the estimates. The column denoted as "1.6*(s.e.)" is the standard error of the estimate, multiplied by 1.6. This value, when added to and subtracted from the point estimate, yields the 90 percent confidence interval for that estimate. The confidence interval is a statistical probability estimate of what the "true" level is, that is, the value which would have been observed had a population census been taken to obtain the figure. Users are strongly advised to review appendix B, Source and Accuracy of the Estimates, if they are unsure as to the appropriate use of standard errors or their calculation.

In practical terms, two seemingly different estimates may not be statistically different because of the sampling variability associated with the estimates. Figures 2 through 5 (corresponding to tables 13 through 16) show point estimates and their corresponding 90 percent confidence intervals in order to illustrate this point. For example, figure 2 shows the proportion of persons ages

25 and above who have completed high school for each of the 50 states and the District of Columbia. The states in this chart have been ordered in terms of the point estimates, that is, the states of Utah and Washington have the highest estimated levels of persons completing high school at 88.2 percent. The associated 90-percent confidence interval for Utah is derived by adding and subtracting 1.9 to this figure. So, with 90 percent confidence, the actual level is expected to be between 86.3 (88.2-1.9) and 90.1 (88.2+1.9) percent. This confidence interval is shown as the band surrounding the point estimate. Note that several states, Washington, Alaska, Wyoming and Minnesota, all have confidence intervals which overlap that of Utah. When the confidence intervals of two estimates overlap, there is a good chance that the two estimates in question may not be statistically different. The exact test to determine statistical difference is detailed in appendix B in the subsection, "Standard Error of a Difference."¹ In the case of these four states, the exact tests show that Washington, Alaska and Wyoming are not different from Utah (as the confidence intervals suggest), but that Minnesota, by a slight margin, is significantly different. Thus, while the point estimates for these states are seemingly smaller than that for Utah, only Minnesota is small enough to statistically justify the claim that it is different from Utah.

The remainder of the states in the graph have confidence intervals which do not overlap that of Utah's. In these cases it is possible to say that Utah has a higher level of high school graduates than those states. In short, one can say that the level of high school completion in Utah is higher than in many other states (that is, at least 46 of them), but it cannot be said from these data that Utah has the highest proportion among all states.

In looking at the bottom of the distribution, one must show similar caution in making comparative statements. The value of 63.2 percent for Alabama is the lowest point estimate of high school completion for any state. However, the 90 percent confidence interval for this estimate overlaps the confidence intervals of Kentucky, Tennessee, Arkansas, Mississippi and West Virginia. Thus, based on the graphical evidence, Alabama may not be statistically different from these states. (In fact, the exact statistical tests show that it is not different from Kentucky or Tennessee, but is different from the other three.) It is true, however, that the estimate for Alabama is lower than those for any of the other remaining 44 states (and D.C.) shown in the table, since the Alabama confidence interval does not overlap with any of these areas.

¹It will sometimes be the case that confidence intervals which overlap only slightly represent estimates which are statistically different, but generally this will not be true. However, when confidence intervals do not overlap it can always be said that the two estimates are statistically different.

Figures 4 and 5 show the high school and college completion levels for 37 different metropolitan areas comprising 50 percent of the total U.S. population ages 25 and above. (Table 15 shows additional detail not included in figure 4 for some subparts of larger metropolitan areas.) Since many of these metropolitan areas are smaller in population than many states, sampling variability tends to be more substantial, as the confidence intervals in the figures attest. These larger confidence intervals make it more difficult to detect statistically significant differences between areas. In the list shown, the Seattle-Tacoma, Washington Consolidated Metropolitan Statistical Area (CMSA) has the highest point estimate in terms of high school completion, at 90.3 percent. Considering the limits of the confidence intervals, however, there are potentially seven other metropolitan areas which may not be statistically different from Seattle-Tacoma. Nevertheless, the non-overlapping confidence intervals show that the other 29 areas do have high school completion levels which are significantly lower than that of Seattle-Tacoma's. Thus, it is clear that the proportion of adults who are high school graduates is much higher in Seattle Tacoma than in many other metropolitan areas throughout the United States. Similarly, while it cannot be said that the San Antonio metropolitan area has the lowest high school completion level among all places listed in table 15, figure 4 makes it clear that the level is statistically different (smaller) from many of the other areas on the list.

Figure 5 shows a case where one area is significantly different from all others in the list. The Washington D.C. metropolitan area (including parts of Maryland and Virginia) has a significantly higher proportion of adults reporting they have completed four or more years of college than any other metropolitan area shown. With a point estimate of 41.2 percent, Washington D.C. is significantly different from all of the other 36 areas in the figure. (Figure 3, based on states and the city of Washington D.C. alone, shows the same singular position for the nation's capital.) The remaining estimates, however, show patterns similar to those seen in the three prior figures; that is, a fair amount of overlap in confidence intervals, thus limiting the ability to make strong statements about the order of places.

In short, the data in tables 13 through 16 and the corresponding figures may help one to make relative statements about the educational attainment levels of states and areas. A given state or area may well be "among the highest" (or lowest) in terms of the level of high school or college completion. Nevertheless, one must remember that all survey estimates have sampling variability associated with them, and exact comparisons and statements must involve the requisite statistical tests.

DETAILED TABULATIONS REDESIGN

A new set of detailed tabulations is being introduced with this issue of this report. These new tabulations are the first major change in the tables since the 1976-1977 report, and will provide greater detail and scope, while maintaining consistency with the prior tabulation series. Table D provides a guide for users who wish to compile time-series data from both sets of tabulations.

Table D. Relation of detailed tabulations in old and new reports

Table Number		Changes
Old Reports (March 76/77 - March 86/87	New Report (Beginning March 88/89	
1	1	
2	2	
3	3	Additional detail
4	4	Additional detail
5	5	
6	7	Additional detail
7	12	Additional detail
8	14	Additional detail
9	16	Additional detail
10	10	
11	17	
12	18	
-	6	New table - labor force status
-	8	New table - income
-	9	New table - earnings
-	11	New table - metro by region
-	13	New table - state summary measures
-	15	New table - metro summary measures

DATA FILES AVAILABLE

The time series tabulations of attainment shown in tables 17 and 18 of this report are now also available on one low density floppy diskette. The tables are available as either two ASCII print files, or two LOTUS 1-2-3 © files (version 2.1). Users wishing to purchase files should specify which data format they prefer (ASCII or LOTUS), include a check for \$10 (make checks payable to "Commerce-Census") and send to:

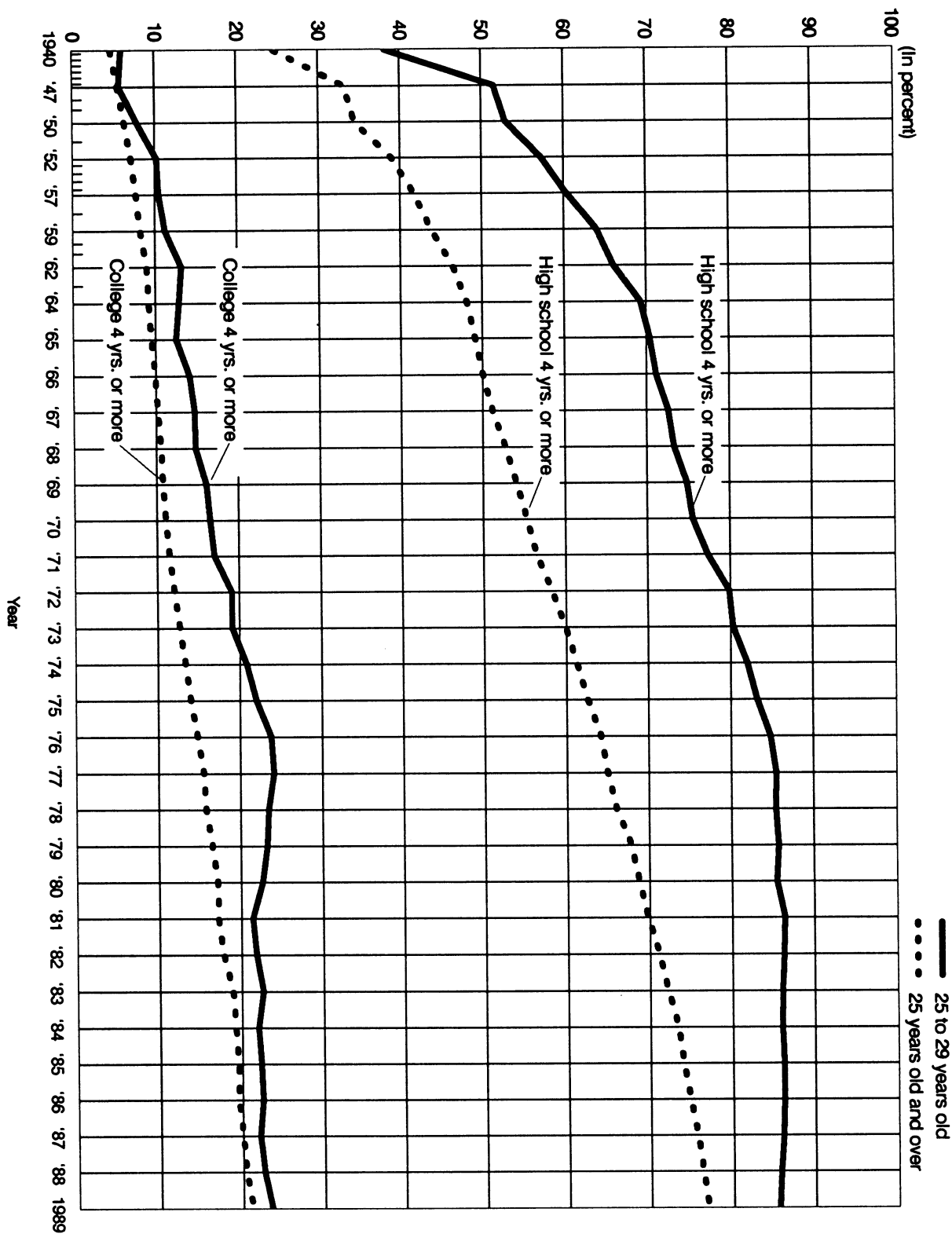
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USER COMMENTS

We are interested in your reaction to the usefulness of the information presented here and to the content of the questions used to produce these results. We welcome your recommendations for improving our survey work. If you have suggestions or comments, please send them to:

Current Survey Comments
Population Division
U.S. Bureau of the Census
Washington, D.C. 20233

Figure 1.
Percent of Persons 25 Years Old and Over Who Have
Completed High School or College: Selected Years 1940 to 1989



Educational Attainment in the United States: March 1989 and 1988

Errata

Figures 2 and 3 of the published report were incorrectly labeled for several States. Please insert this errata sheet into your copy of the published report.

Figure 2.
Percent High School Graduates, by State, March 1989
 Persons age 25 and over

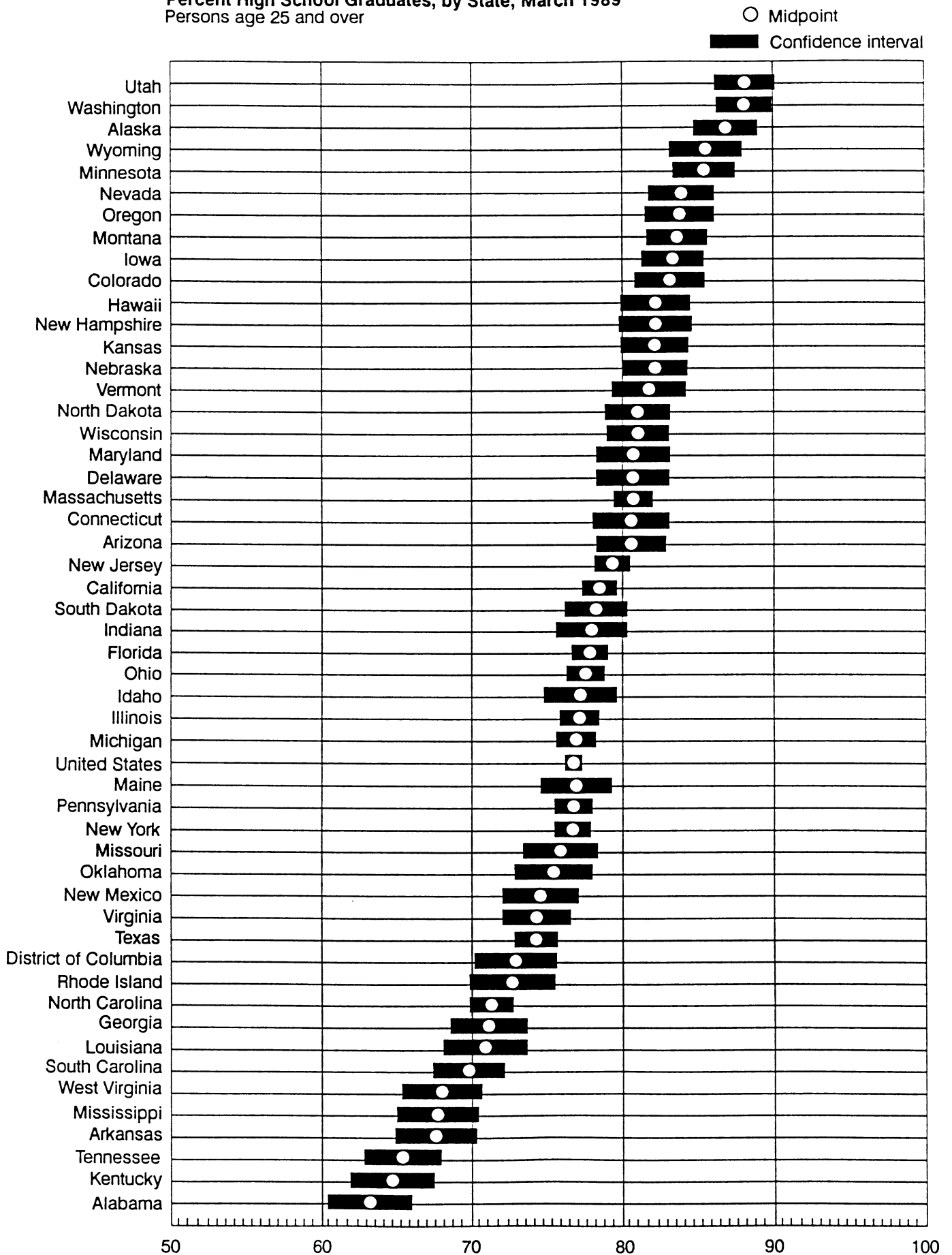


Figure 3.
Percent Completing Four or More Years of College,
by State, March 1989
Persons age 25 and over

○ Midpoint

■ Confidence interval

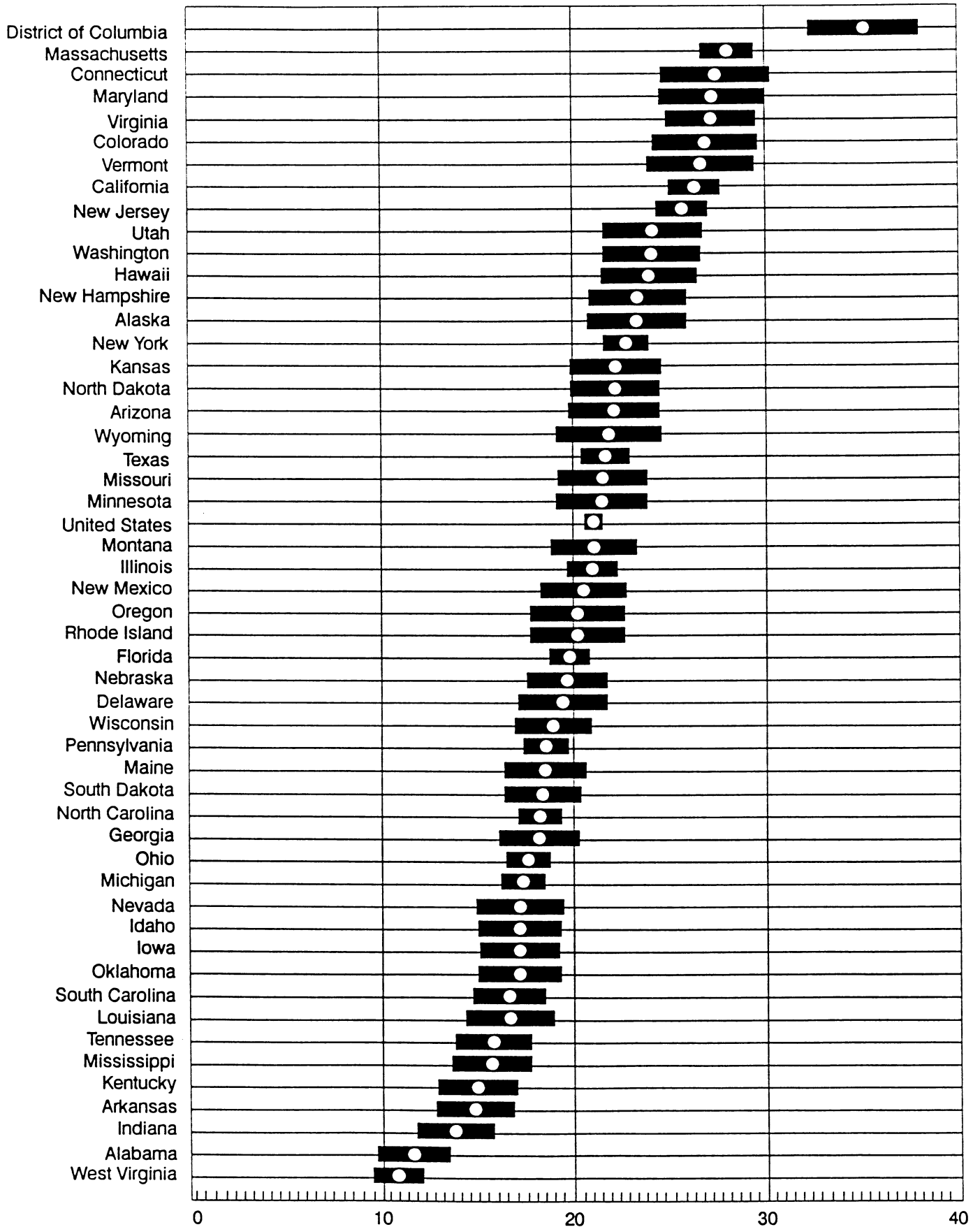


Figure 4.
Percent High School Graduates,
by Selected Metropolitan Areas, March 1989
Persons age 25 and over

○ Midpoint
■ Confidence interval

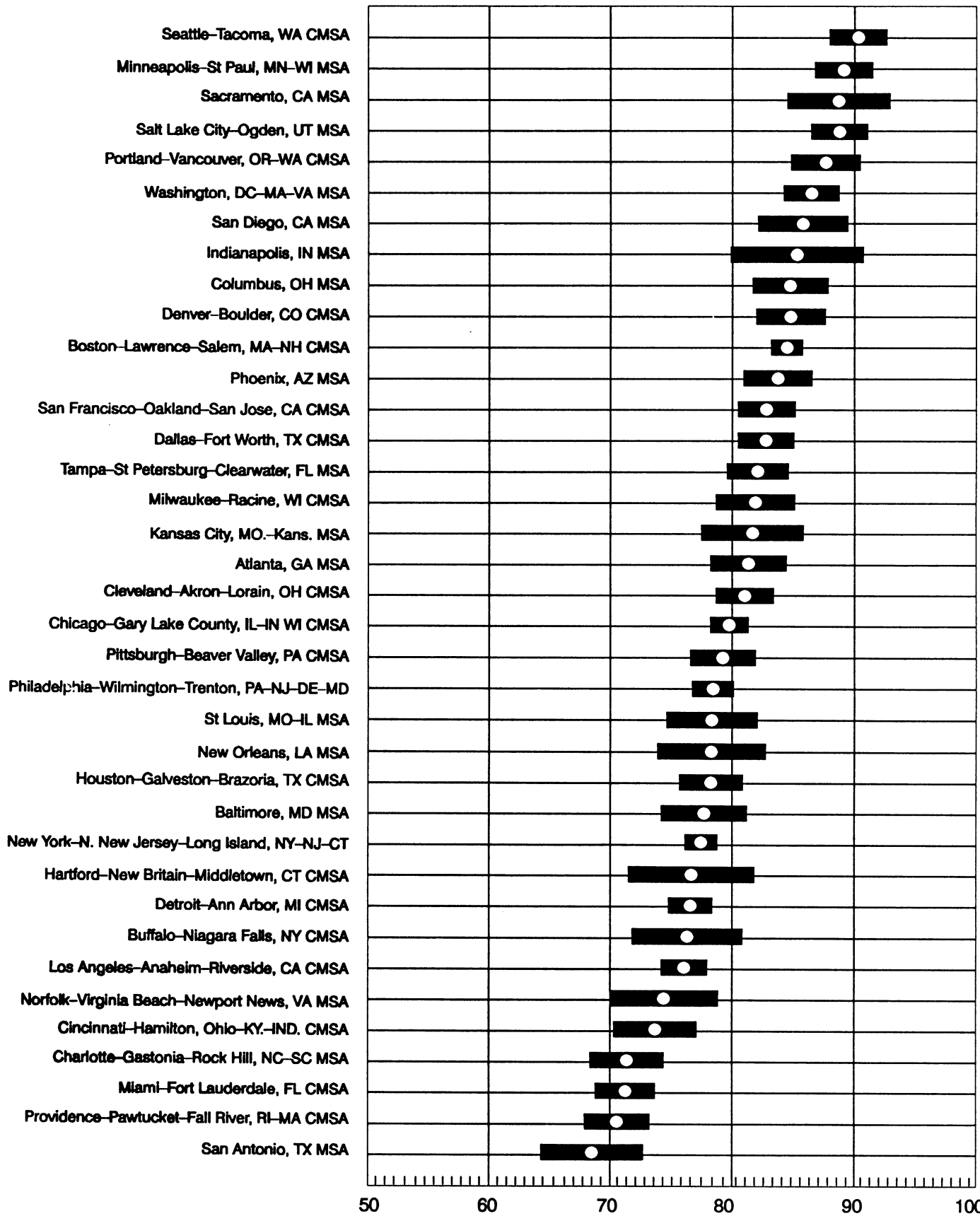


Figure 5.
Percent Completing Four or More Years of College,
by Selected Metropolitan Areas, March 1989
Persons age 25 and over

